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SUBJECT: COALITIONS ATTEMPT TO CHALLENGE TRADITIONAL PARTIES

REF: A. SAN JOSE 1298

[B](#). SAN JOSE 1408

[C](#). SAN JOSE 3042

SUMMARY

[1](#). Voters, disappointment with the two traditional political parties may give several newly-formed parties the opportunity to capture a significant number of votes in the 2006 Presidential and Legislative Assembly elections. While these newly-formed parties are organizing coalitions to exploit this opportunity, ideological differences and personal ambitions may hinder their ability to form a significant political bloc. Local cantonal parties are working to revitalize politics at the grassroots levels. END SUMMARY.

Traditional Parties Face Exodus, Internal Division

[2](#). The 2004 corruption scandals marked an important turning point in the political landscape. The resulting disillusionment has leaders within each of the two traditional political parties struggling to maintain cohesion in the run-up to the 2006 elections. Several National Liberation Party (PLN) principals have left the party to form their own groups. The Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC) is also struggling to quell internal disputes, and there are at least two distinct groups whose differences on the party's platform appear irreconcilable.

[3](#). In addition to the two traditional political parties, five new national parties registered to participate in the 2006 elections (reftels A, B, and C). Eleven new provincial and thirteen new cantonal (local) parties were also registered. The five new national parties, which are eligible to run presidential, legislative, and local government candidates are: Nationalist Democratic Alliance (headed by Jose Miguel Villalobos, a former PUSC minister); Homeland First (headed by Juan Jose Vargas, a former Citizens, Action Party (PAC) legislator who left the party and is now an independent in the Legislative Assembly); National Union (headed by the former human rights Ombudsman and PUSC party member, Jose Manuel Echandi); Union for Change (headed by Antonio Alvarez-Desanti, a former PLN minister and president of the Legislative Assembly); and Patriotic Union (headed by Jose Miguel Corrales, current independent legislator and former PLN presidential candidate (1998) and legislator).

Smaller Parties Look To Form Coalitions

[4](#). Smaller political parties are forming coalitions in hopes of drawing support away from the PUSC and PLN by presenting a viable alternative to voters who are tired of the traditional party leaders and their lack of an articulated platform. The Electoral Code establishes that two or more political parties may formally register coalitions until October 21 (election day is February 6, 2006). Informal coalitions can form at any time. According to Justice Luis Sobrado from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), with a few exceptions neither formal nor informal coalitions have had real impact during the last fifty years. Undaunted, the Patriotic Union Party and the Nationalist Democratic Alliance formed the Great National Alliance (GANA) on June 17, in an effort to consolidate their bases of support and become a serious political contender for the presidential vote. Five left-wing parties have also organized into the United Left (IU) coalition.

The Left Is Still Struggling For Significance

[5](#). During the 2002 election, no leftist party obtained a seat in the Legislative Assembly. The far-left has been almost invisible during the last three years. Due to personal ambitions, party leaders have squandered opportunities for growth by engaging in divisive battles for control, allowing other political parties with center-left characteristics such as the PAC and Patriotic Union to draw support away from the left's more traditional base. In

2004, leftist groups began organizing an alliance (the IU), which currently consists of a coalition of five parties. The IU is a radical left coalition that opposes CAFTA-DR, fiscal reform, labor flexibility, and privatization of state-owned institutions (telecommunications, insurance, social security, and utilities). There are currently two other principal leftist parties. Former Legislative Assembly Deputy (1998-2002) for the leftist Democratic Force Jose Merino founded Broad Front in 2004. Labor unions, environmentalists, and feminists constitute this group. Finally, the Democratic Force, founded in 1992, is still in existence.

16. Democratic Force and Popular Vanguard (part of the IU) are registered to participate in the national February 2006 elections. Broad Front is registered to run candidates in the provincial elections. In a July 1 meeting, political analyst Juany Guzman told Poloff and Pol Assistant that Democratic Force is the only leftist party with any chance of winning a Legislative Assembly seat in the 2006 elections.

----- Differing Ideologies May Hinder Political Alliances -----

17. During the month of July, four smaller political groups with little previous electoral appeal added their support to the GANA coalition. GANA expects to finalize an agreement with the Broad Front Party (socialist) and hopes to reach agreement with the National Integration Party (center right). According to political analyst Carlos Montenegro, GANA,s success will depend on its ability to reach out to Union for Change (center-right), National Union (center-right), and the PAC (center-left). In Montenegro,s view, if these parties continue working separately then the tired of politics as usual vote will be too diluted to counter the traditional PLN and PUSC bases of support. In a July 21 conversation with Pol Assistant, Legislative Assembly staffer Rosemary Serrano expressed concern that failure to form alliances would result in an Assembly as fractured as the current one or worse.

18. Ideological differences are obstructing GANA,s attempt to expand the alliance. Union for Change recently stated it would not join the alliance since GANA opposes CAFTA-DR. PAC leaders, who share GANA,s opposition to CAFTA-DR, have also publicly rejected the alliance. GANA representatives continue to woo National Union leader Echandi, who is more receptive to forming a coalition, though his stand on CAFTA-DR is opposite GANA,s.

19. Besides ideological differences among parties, analyst Carlos Montenegro considers that any potential coalition is threatened by previous party quarrels and the candidates, personal ambitions. Several former PAC members, for example, founded the Patriotic Union. Leaders of each party have been unable to resolve their differences despite their mutual goal of defeating Oscar Arias of the PLN, who is the clear front-runner according to polls. Other leaders of newly organized parties are so far unwilling to give up their individual (and unrealistic) presidential aspirations in order to form a coalition. Corrales (Patriotic Union Party) and Villalobos (Nationalist Democratic Alliance) are two prime examples.

----- Voters Lose Faith in Traditional Parties, Not In Politics -----

10. Cantonal parties have experienced a significant increase in number with thirteen newly registered parties (fifty percent increase) since the 2002 election. Cantonal activists believe that voters prefer to vote for people from their hometowns who will represent their local interests, as opposed to backing traditional party leaders, who are considered overly committed to the party,s larger agenda. Vladimir Sacasa, president of a recently registered cantonal political party, commented on June 27 that citizens have lost faith in traditional parties, but not in the political process itself. Cantonal parties running candidates in local elections do not receive any campaign financing from the state budget (as national parties do); therefore, campaigns are financed by local fundraisers operated by volunteers. PLN youth movement president Carmen Conejo told Pol Assistant on July 20 that cantonal parties are stronger than ever and will probably continue to increase in number. She explained that, as a result, the PLN strategy at provincial levels is to provide training targeted at young adults to encourage their participation in local governments and to counter rising voter abstention rates.

----- COMMENT -----

11. An alliance of center and left-leaning parties is trying to elbow its way through the crowd of political parties, but so far lacks the kind of leadership needed to make it a serious political contender. Its various leaders are unable to overcome personal differences to incorporate the plethora

of small parties and formulate a unified political platform. It appears the only element in common amongst the divergent leadership is the goal of defeating PLN presidential candidate Oscar Arias. However, the thirteen emerging cantonal (local) parties could present opportunities to generate actions and alliances between communities and political parties at the grass-roots level, thereby stimulating citizens, involvement in national elections.

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